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ABSTRACT

Observing children is a task teachers and caregivers perform to understand the unique characteristics of each child. Observation alone can be helpful, but in combination with record keeping it becomes a valuable aid to understanding child development and can be used as a basis for making decisions about appropriate experiences to foster each child's development. This booklet offers guidelines for observation and record keeping in early childhood settings. It examines the reasons for observing children, the value of observation skills and good records, and ethical considerations. Tips on how to gather information about children are briefly outlined. Three types of observation methods discussed in detail are: (1) anecdotes, the complete record of an incident from beginning to its natural conclusion related in the past tense; (2) running records, a narrative or continuous recording of everything a child says and does within a unit of time; and (3) checklists, including developmental checklists, skill checklists, and program checklists. Each method is described, and examples or sample records for each method are included. Decoding, the process of analyzing the recorded data, is discussed, along with summary writing. Examples of decoding and a summary are included. Each section of the booklet includes references. (TJQ)

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OBSERVATION & RECORD KEEPING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

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ANN VEALE and BARBARA PISCITELLI

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Authors: Ann Veale
Lecturer in Early Childhood
de Lissa Institute of Early Childhood
and Family Studies
South Australian College of Advanced Education

Barbara Piscitelli
Lecturer
Department of Care and Education
School of Early Childhood Studies
Brisbane College of Advanced Education

Cover Illustration: Publications Section BCAE
Art and Design: Frank di Tullio and Rebecca Beveridge

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by
ANN VEALE and BARBARA PISCITELLI

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WHY OBSERVE? WHAT DO WE OBSERVE?

Observing children is one task teachers and caregivers must perform to understand the unique characteristics that makes each child tick. Observation alone can be helpful; but in combination with record keeping it becomes a most valuable aid to understanding child development. Records help us focus on the child and extend an awareness of the individual person.

Various methods are used for recording data about children. Some of the methods are:

- daily log or diary
- anecdotes
- running records
- charts
- checklists and rating lists
- activity records
- collections of children's work
- parent conference reports
- application information
- sociograms

Why study children?

Children are complex beings and if we are going to really care for and provide for them properly we must know about their strengths, weaknesses, interests, fears, joys and ideas. The study methods we will explore in this booklet will help us find **facts** about each child's individual interests and help us plan an individualised program.

Collecting factual information gives teachers and caregivers some clues about the person. Each clue helps to plan for stimulating learning experiences and appropriate caregiving for the child.

Those working with children may well feel somewhat puzzled as to the reasons for spending time learning about the skills of observing children when there already exists a vast body of literature on child development that is detailed in all aspects. We can read all we need to know about child development from the accumulated wisdom of the experts and certainly, we cannot do without the information that the texts can provide on norms and general stages of development. However, we all know as teachers and caregivers, and perhaps as parents, uncles or aunts, that there are wide differences between children of the same chronological age, and there can also be wide differences within the same child with respect to the different aspects of development. Through careful observation and accurate record keeping the observer can become acutely aware of each child's distinctive characteristics and levels of development.

The best methods of learning about individual children rely on skills:

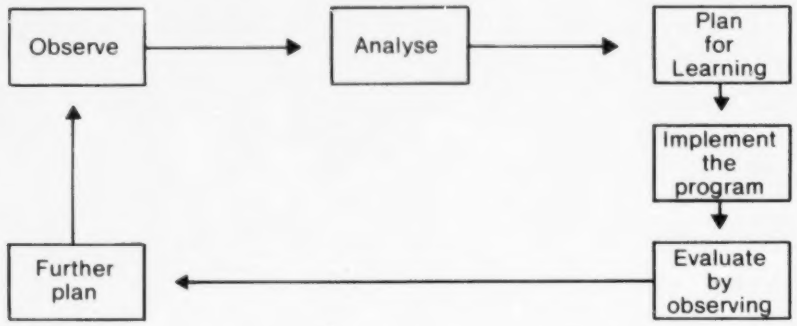
- of close **observation** of on-going behaviour
- of detailed **recording** of behaviour as it occurs
- of later **analysis** of the information thus gained.

These skills are an important part of teacher's and caregiver's repertoire. The information that we gain in this way is the basis upon which we plan for individual children. Thus, based on a sound knowledge of the child gained through careful accumulated evidence from observations, we are able to set realistic goals for the child's on-going progress and learning.

In his book, *Intelligence & Experience*, J. McVicker Hunt (1961) describes the dynamic balance that is a necessary condition for a child to learn. He calls this "The Learning Match". The match occurs when sensitive teachers and caregivers provide opportunities and experiences for a child that meet the child's needs, interests and capabilities. Such opportunities do not occur by mere chance or luck, but are usually well founded selections based on matching the ideas, interests and skills of children with materials, events and other people that invite the child to approach and explore. When choosing the adult needs to keep in mind that children require enough familiarity to make them comfortable. At the same time, a degree of difficulty is important to challenge the child and to prevent boredom.

Caregivers and teachers can use their observations as a basis for making considered decisions about appropriate experiences to foster development. Through observation, the adult can determine the capabilities, needs and interests of the child. Once these factors are known, the teacher or caregiver is able to match materials, space, time, playmates and interactions to suit the individual's preference.

This simple flow chart may help to illustrate this point:



The process is not just a simply linear one, but is continuous and cyclical because the child's behaviour changes as he/she develops. It is worth remembering at this point that the child's period of most rapid growth takes place between 0-6 years (with a further spurt at puberty). These facts are of particular importance to early childhood personnel because, as Pringle (1975:20) says:

> "available evidence suggests that environmental influences have the greatest effect during the most rapid periods of growth. From this it follows that it is experiences and opportunities during the early years of life which are particularly vital to later development."

THE VALUE OF OBSERVING SKILLS

Observing and recording behaviour not only enables caregivers and teachers to plan for children as we have already discussed, but the very act of observing has the boomerang effect of **sharpening perceptions** as we do it. Thus observers become more sensitive as the result of experience. Even though it is impossible to note down every single thing that a child says and does, we are able to learn more about specific children and at the same time we sharpen our own awareness.

Another of the real and tangible values of observation is that we begin to amass a personalised collection of information which, when interpreted, gives us a factual basis for understanding a child's development. As we accumulate data we interpret, analyse, and sort details and descriptions into the broad areas of development.

A child develops and integrates all kinds of abilities all at once yet somehow the teacher or caregiver must be able to disentangle various aspects of development to be able to establish where the child is located with respect to each developmental area at any given time.

Various authors identify the categories differently but they all isolate four areas of the child's development that can be categorised as follows:

- physical (i.e. large muscle and small muscle)
- social
- emotional
- intellectual/cognitive (including language)

Records have value to other people

Knowledge of individual children thus gained and analysed is not only necessary for the professional's own benefit for planning children's goals but is also of valuable assistance to para-medical and other professional people, e.g. speech therapists or child psychologists, who may need the help of practised observers when making medical or guidance decisions. Careful accumulated observation of children over time could range to several years, and may be of great value to professional teams.

In daily work teachers and caregivers have very close relationships with parents . . . in many cases this is a twice daily contact. A person who has been a close observer of children has helpful comments to pass on to the parents and the parents can add to this understanding from their greater knowledge of their child.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Those of us who work with young children fully realise the value of knowing background information about the child in order to be able to understand any special circumstances that may apply to him/her. There are, however, people in the community who do not feel ready to answer these kinds of questions about their children - at least until they feel confident in their relationships with the teacher or caregiver.

Early childhood personnel must maintain a professional respect for the rights of parents who may not wish to divulge background information about the child and the family. At other times, we may have access to information about the family and the child which we may decide not to record in writing, in order to protect their confidentiality.

The observer of children, either as student or professional, must always treat all records about children with professional respect. This, of course, applies to jottings in notebooks which should never be left lying about where they could be read by others. Children should never be spoken of within the hearing of other children, or between staff, in the hearing of parents, or with other adults in the centre. In any written records children should be identified by first name only, and staff labelled as Teacher, Caregiver or Director or by initial only. The name of the centre, institution or school should not be identified by name.

HOW TO GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN

Before we study the specific techniques of recording, a little time should be spent considering two very important aspects of the problem:

(1) what sort of things do you record
(2) how do you write down what you see.

In the first aspect the key notion is that the child's behaviour is a part of a personal language. You are looking at and learning from what the child does. Overt behaviour is an act easily observed by others, i.e. behaviour that you can see. This behaviour may have several possible causes for which there may be positive clues that can assist us to decide which are relevant. The observer assembles the clues and is able to make some evaluation based on knowledge of what signs of behaviour are significant:

- the level and span of attention (i.e. whether he flits quickly from one choice to another, whether he does one thing while looking at another, or whether he has attention for only one thing at a time).
- competency and level of autonomy (does the child choose tasks and manage at a level that one would expect for his age, or does he invariably ask for help and direction before selecting play material).
- the amount and quality of physical movement (is he passive and still, or is he always on the verge of flight, liable to scatter blocks in all directions as he flies off).
- the range of verbal and non-verbal communication skills - (does he use language or sound accompaniment to everything he does, or does he respond only in grunts when spoken to).

Quality of behaviour can enhance our understanding

The child communicates with the body and with the voice. Some of these aspects are obvious, in other instances we need to look more closely to uncover what it is that the child has to reveal. A child's body has postures that are expressive, e.g. **floppy**, **tense**. The body moves in rhythms that may be **jerky** or **smooth**, **effortless** or **laboured**. Movement also has tempo; **slow** or **deliberate**, **hasty**, **abrupt**, and so on. Facial expressions are the most commonly identified sources of information that we all rely on in everyday life. Eyes can **crinkle with humor**, **squint**, **blink**, **open wide**, while the mouth itself can show feelings without the use of words, e.g., it can **quiver**, or **grin**, **grit teeth**, **bite lips**, or it can be **twisted with effort**. It is evident that these details correlate to actions and expressions such as excitement, determination or concentration. From these sources we seek sufficient information about a child's behaviour to be able to interpret what we see.

The child's speech can tell us far more than is revealed by the actual use of language, and choice of vocabulary. The child also communicates through tone, pitch and loudness of voice - by what is called the paralinguistic aspect of speech. Sometimes we can gauge the emotional significance from the pitch of the child's voice before being close enough to actually hear the words.

You will find it valuable to compile your own list of descriptive terms by referring to Cohen & Stern (1983:7-10) or other references/sources.

Recording on different occasions

If children become accustomed to the observer regularly sitting down with pencil and notebook they will be less likely to be concerned with the process of being observed. If children are conscious of being observed the sample of behaviour that you see may not be a true representative sample of the children's normal behaviour. Different solutions have to be found to overcome this problem.

Some children's centres have one-way glass observation windows to permit observation without children's knowledge that they are being observed. Some people may be familiar with this situation from experience in the Lady Gowrie Centres in the capital cities in each State.

An observer in the home or centre, by contrast, is what Boehm (1977:62) calls a 'participant observer' in that he/she is a part of the situation that is being recorded and this takes great patience and self-discipline. This may mean that many observations may be incomplete because of interruption, but, in compensation for this disadvantage, the observer with a group of children is able to collect many records for each child at different times on their own or with a group, and with a variety of play materials.

The language of recording

Observers may find Chapter 5 of Cohen & Stern (1983) an aid to expression as they begin practising the skill of observation. Having discussed how a child communicates with body language and voice, we are then faced with the task of conveying what we see, and expressing the quality of the child's behaviour, on paper. A quick reference to this chapter from time to time may show how descriptive you can be with language, while at the same time striving to be objective.

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TYPES OF OBSERVATIONAL RECORDING

We are going to look at three different basic types of observational methods and practise skills in recording. The three basic types are:

anecdotes
running records
check lists

METHOD 1: ANECDOTES

The anecdote provides a good starting point because most of us are familiar with the basic idea of recounting an incident after the event. We probably all entertain the family and friends with the events of the day. Any such complete related incident is an anecdote. The anecdote, as we use the term, is the complete record of an incident from beginning to its natural conclusion related in the past tense because we are recalling it after the event has happened.

Characteristics of a good anecdote

- An anecdote gives information about the setting by providing details about
  - date
  - time
  - place
  - names and ages (in brackets) of children taking part

The date is essential data because the child's behaviour changes with time and the dating gives some indication of the rate of change.

- An anecdote describes:
  - the **actions** of the child
  - the **reactions** of other people involved
  - the child's **response** to those actions
- The anecdote quotes (if possible)
  - what is said **to** the child during the action
  - what is said **by** the child during the action

However, reported speech noted will not be as detailed in an anecdote as it is in the running record, where the observation is recorded as the behaviour happens, with the consequent opportunity to write down conversation as it is said.

- The account must give the reader clues as to the mood of the child. 'Mood cues', i.e. clues from posture, gestures, voice qualities, and facial expression **may** help us to know how the child **felt** at that particular time. You are not seeking to make subjective interpretations of the child's feelings such as 'the child was seeking attention because he is feeling jealous because he has a new baby brother at home'. You are seeking to record cues from the child's behaviour in descriptive language which can aid a reader to be able to judge how the child was functioning.
- The anecdote must cover the whole episode from beginning to end, so that it forms a record of a behavioural moment in the life of the child.

Some observers are skilled at making a few notes as on the spot reminders to themselves, but characteristically the anecdote is written up later, after the children have left.

Anecdote: Example 1

Date : February 14th
Time : Morning playtime
Place : Playground
Setting : Table with musical instruments is set up under a tree. A mat is on the ground nearby.
Children : Peter (4.0)

Peter (4.0) walked purposefully over to the table and leaned across to reach the drum. He grasped it with both hands. With his right hand, he then selected a big, soft mallet. He carried both drum and mallet over to the mat, where he sat down with his legs extended in front of him and the drum between his knees. He watched the drum intently as he beat in a regular rhythm. As the teacher walked by, he looked up and exclaimed to her "did you hear that?" The teacher dropped down on her knees beside him, "Do that again Peter while I listen." Peter continued experimenting while the teacher listened. When she withdrew, he picked up drum and mallet, and flung them on the table, before running off to join the group who were playing with the hose in the sandpit.

Anecdote: Example 2

Date : February 14th
Time : Morning, before tea
Place : Children's Centre, activity area, indoors
Setting : 4 children (age ranges 2.10 - 3.4) and Mrs. G. were seated around the dough table.

Smiling widely, Sarah (3.1) began to talk a little to Mrs. G. after being asked a specific question. She looked only at Mrs. G. as she spoke. When she started talking, all but one child moved away from the dough table. When the others came back, she stopped talking again.

The value of anecdotes

As has been already mentioned, planned anecdote writing sharpens the observer's mental set for the situation that is being observed. It also accustoms the observer to looking at the behaviour of children more objectively in order to record what is seen. The anecdote itself contributes information about a particular child, or more than one child, which when added to a collection of records gathered over a period of time, yields insight into a child's functioning. Some types of information that can be learned about a child through anecdotes:

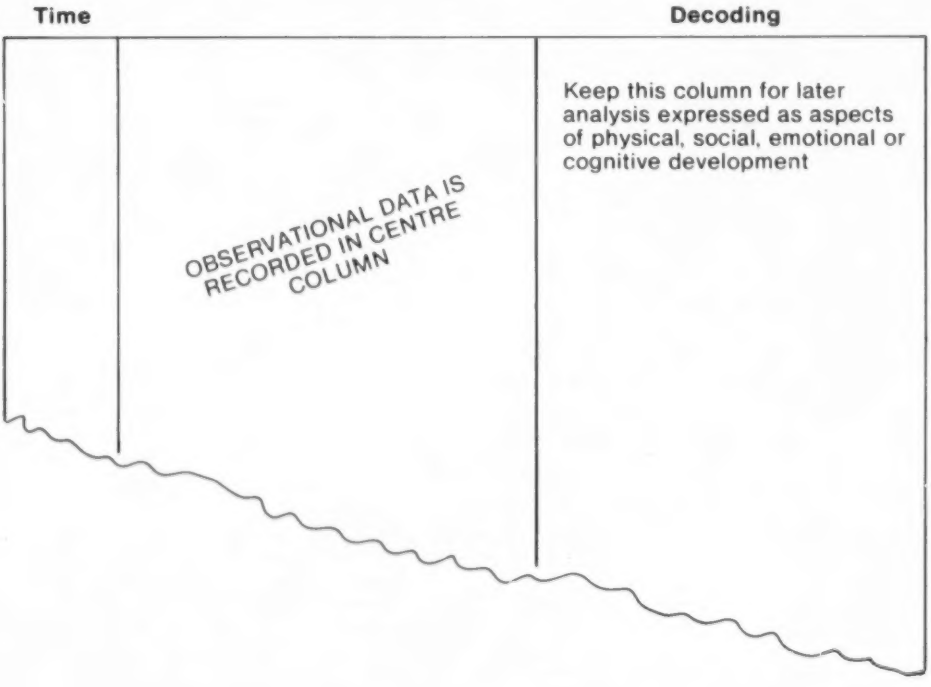
- Anecdotes describe characteristic ways in which a child acts.
- The observer searches for clues to the child's mood. When these are added to descriptions of the child's behaviour valuable evidence is provided as to how the child feels and reacts to situations and people.
- Recurring patterns of behaviour in a child, revealed as the result of an accumulation of anecdotes, are a valuable guide to problem areas in developmental tasks that the child may be resolving. From this knowledge the teachers or caregivers can devise strategies designed to achieve specific goals to aid the child accomplish those tasks.
- The quality of the child's social interaction with his peers as revealed in anecdotes can also isolate problem areas in adjustment where a child lacks skills. The teacher and caregiver can help the child attain the skills required by planning for graduated steps in achievement, leading to the desired skill.
- Recorded anecdotes enable an observer to view the child's behaviour more objectively, divorced from the provocations of the immediate situation. A glance back through your records may remind you that a child who is aggressively noisy now was so quiet two months ago that you had despaired of the child ever making a satisfactory adjustment to the centre. You may now plan to modify the boisterous behaviour but you are able to make this decision in full knowledge of the developmental strides that the child has already achieved.
- Adults may also gain insight into the effects that their moods have on handling a particular child. It is possible to remain unaware that our own feelings are impeding our sensible handling of a particular kind of situation. However, anecdotal recording sharpens our awareness of our own behaviour and moods.

SAMPLE LAY-OUT SHEET FOR ANECDOTES AND RUNNING RECORDS

Date:

Time: e.g. 10.15am - 10.35am

Setting: **where** the action takes place
what other people were involved e.g. John (3.4) Tracy (4.2)
state any background **activity** that may be related.


Time
Decoding
Keep this column for later analysis expressed as aspects of physical, social, emotional or cognitive development
OBSERVATIONAL DATA IS RECORDED IN CENTRE COLUMN

Notes:

1. Record children's ages as at 1st of month e.g. birthday on June 16 - at August 1st would be 4.2 (i.e. June + 2 months).
2. Repeat age (in brackets) each time you mention the child - **you** may know the age, but the reader has to as well.
3. **Underline all direct conversation**, for ease of reading.
4. Use complete sentences when you rewrite your record in longhand.
5. **Note:** Use past tense for anecdotes, present tense for running records.

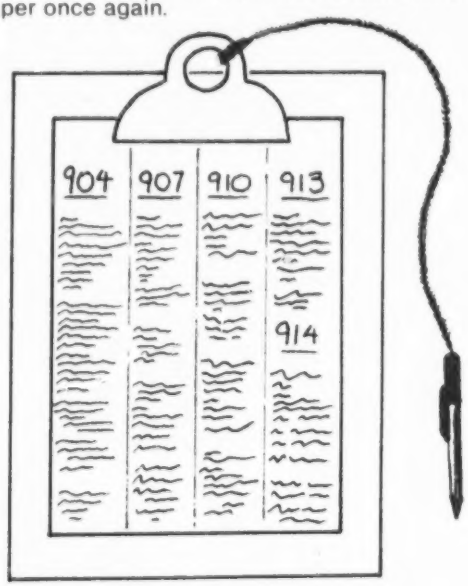
METHOD 2: RUNNING RECORDS

The Running Record is a narrative or continuous recording of everything a child says and does within a unit of time. The method is classed as an 'open' one because the observer is not deliberately selective in the focus of observations on a particular behaviour. The observer faithfully records descriptions both of the behaviour of the child and of the situation in which it occurs using direct, everyday language. Everything the child says and does, and everything that is said and done to him is recorded. A clipboard, pen and a watch are all that is required. The time needs to be recorded in the left hand margin at regular intervals because the observations can cover many pages if the child is lively and active. Without knowledge of the time scale it would be difficult to make interpretations of the record later. Do not attempt to generalise about behaviour - simply write descriptions of behaviour in the **present tense**, because you are recording the behaviour as it occurs.

This method of observing is not easy, but it is possible to devise personal shorthand methods that reduce the amount of time spent writing as one does in taking down lecture notes. As discussed before, it is preferable that children do not realise that they are being observed and it is possible for an adult who is present and busily writing to remain cut off from the action. The more unobtrusive the observer is, the more children behave in natural and typical ways. As the purpose of the observation is to learn about typical behaviours, the less disturbance to their 'on-going' behaviour that is caused by the presence of the observer - the more valid and reliable the observations will be.

In writing running records, the observer should experiment with different techniques of recording. The easiest method we have used is this:

> Fold a page into four length wise columns. Attach the page to a clipboard. Record time in the upper left hand column. Commence recording. Write single descriptive words in a list like fashion down the first column. When filled, record time in next column and proceed down the paper once again.



A ten minute record can usually be easily fitted on to a page in this fashion.

When the record is complete, the observer must take time immediately to record details in longhand and in full sentence format.

Two detailed samples of running records are provided on the following pages for your information and guidance.

SAMPLE RUNNING RECORD 1

Date: April 3rd

Time: 2.05 - 2.15pm

Simon (0.9m) is in the main kindy room. His mother was in the room some of the time or in the nearby kitchen. Sister, Emma (4.11) and Matthew (4.4) were also involved and Jason (4.7).

Time		Decoding
2.05	Simon (0.9) is sitting unsupported in his pusher. His head is erect and back straight. He holds his rattle in his right hand (palmer grip). He looks at the children nearby and drops his rattle. The toy is returned. He looks, unblinking, at the observer and drops the toy over the side on his right and slightly behind him. He twists to the right from the waist, turning his left shoulder to look at the toy. It is returned to him. He grasps it using thumb, palm and fingers and immediately drops it again.	
2.06	Matthew (4.4) approaches and takes a wheeled toy from the footrest of the pusher and pulls it across the floor 3 metres away. Simon (0.9) watches it as it travels along the floor. He holds his rattle by the handle curling four fingers around it, thumb on top and twists his wrist (right hand) back and forth. The toys are all returned. He looks at Matthew (4.4) without blinking and then at his rattle.	
2.07	Jason (4.7) stands in front of Simon (0.9) and clashes cymbals. Simon (0.9) blinks at each connection. Jason (4.7) withdraws and the observer removes Simon from his pusher.	
2.08	Simon (0.9) makes a gutteral "mmmgh", and smiling, crawls right arm, left leg, left arm, right leg, directly to the main cupboard a metre away. Still on his knees he picks up a wooden uncoloured shape with his right hand using palm and fingers but is attracted by a coloured pile up puzzle. He releases the shape which drops on the carpet. Simon (0.9) looks at it, but then reaches for a multi-coloured jigsaw on a higher shelf, then at a pegboard. Using two fingers and the thumb he pulls a peg from the board. He hits remaining pegs with his right hand. He releases the peg in his left hand and pulls the pegboard towards himself with both hands.	
2.10	They fall out and he looks up at the observer and smiles. He picks up a peg with his right hand, palmer grasp, bangs it on the shelf and drops it.	
2.11	He stretches his right arm and grasps the shelf placing fingers above and his thumb underneath it. He places his weight on his right foot by bringing his right knee forward. He now places his left foot flat on the carpet and stands erect with his right foot forward and his left slightly behind, heel raised and wobbles slightly. He fingers a puzzle by rubbing his fingers	
2.12	over it several times then stretches forward to pick at another. He attempts to look behind himself, stretching at the neck. He loses balance, clutches at the flat shelf with his fingers and thumb, extends his left foot further behind and reestablishes equilibrium. He continues to pick up puzzle pieces with his left hand using a pincer grip and places one piece	
2.13	into his mouth. He removes it and bangs the piece on the board. It drops and he bends forward in the direction of the piece. He places his left hand on the ground then his right hand and then his knees and crawls across the floor towards the door, head erect. He goes at a child, who appears in the doorway, slips back onto his buttocks, slips his leg in front of him, outstretched and places his hands flat on his knees. He twists right around to look behind, shoulders, head and waist. He straightens again,	
2.15	looks up at the children coming in the door. He makes a happy sound 'mmugh' and gives a little jig from the buttocks. His sister Emma approaches, he smiles widely, eyes on her face and calls 'emmhul'.	

SAMPLE RUNNING RECORD 2

Child: Alice, 25 months

Date: May 20th

Time: 9.50 - 10.00

Setting: In the main kindergarten room. Alice has been left by her mother at 9.00, and she is quite comfortable with this situation.

Time		Decoding
9.50	Alice is standing by the collage table, both feet flat on the floor. She reaches with her right arm and supports herself on the table as she lifts her left leg and kneels on a chair, her right arm is placed on the back of the chair, back rest. Alice kneels with her right leg and turns to the front and places her bottom in the chair seat and dangles her legs in front, legs together. She reaches with her left hand across the table, leaning her body forward from the waist. She picks up a piece of stiff paper, using finger-thumb opposition. She places the paper on the edge of the table and slips her middle fingers of both hands through the holes in the scissors, with her right hand on top she closes the blades together to cut the paper. She opens the blades by pulling her hands away from each other and moves the scissors further along the paper. She continues snipping, using the same action. Alice removes her left hand from the scissors and turns the paper around then cuts it again the same way. She stares around the room and then reaches with her left hand and says "pencil", as she removes it from the pot, she drops it on the table and then reinserts her left finger into the scissor hole and snips at the paper. Alice stops cutting and looks at the table, she withdraws her left hand from the scissors and reaches with her right hand and slots the scissors into the hole cut in a tin. She takes the glue brush, her right forefinger and thumb down the shaft, her other fingers supporting. She dabs glue on to the paper then replaces the brush, and dabs it up and down and then presses the brush down on her work, and she watches the bristles as they spread apart. Alice comments "**see blue**". She replaces the brush and takes another brush and dabs on more glue on to her work. She replaces the brush and lifts her work off the table using her thumb and forefinger of her left hand. Alice looks over at the table containing the collage equipment and points with her right hand saying "that one, pa-per". She drops her work onto the table and slips off the chair and walks towards the table, and she stops and bending from the waist, knees straight she picks up the reel of masking tape off the floor. She turns and walks back to the work table.	
9.55	Smiling broadly she comments "Sticky tape". She raises her left leg and kneels on the chair, her left arm rests on the table and she grips the chair back with her right hand. She brings her right leg up to kneel then turns to the front and sits on the chair. Alice turns the reel of tape around and around between her hands. She picks up a pair of scissors with her right hand and extends both articles towards "O" saying "**scissors**". "O" explains we can tear it and Alice repeats, "tear", as "O" tears a strip and passes it to Alice. Alice presses the tape over her dabs of glue, using forefingers of both hands. She rubs both her hands together and then slips off the chair, steadying herself on the table and chair back. Alice walks to the dough table and raises her left leg and kneels on the chair, her left arm supports her on the table and her right arm is on the chair back.	

10.00	She raises her right leg and then turns and sits. She picks up a shape with her right hand and presses it down on to the dough in front of her. She 'digs' the shape out from the surrounding dough and lays it in a frypan. She slips off the chair and grasps the handle of the frypan with her right hand, fingers and thumb curled around it. She walks to the play oven and opens the door with her left hand, by holding the handle and pulling her hand downwards. She slides the frypan into the oven and with her right hand raises the door and closes it. She rises onto tip-toes and peers into the oven window, then stands flat again and reaches with her left hand and turns the dial, swivelling her wrist in a clockwise twist. She opens the door with her left hand and reaches in and slides the frypan out towards her. She reaches with her right hand and pinches the dough between her right hand forefinger and thumb. She slides the pan back into the oven and closes the door. She turns the dial with her left hand and then with the thumb of her right hand she presses on the switch. She turns and walks back to the dough table and sits down to continue playing.	

METHOD 3: CHECKLISTS

There are two distinctly different types of checklists that are used regularly in centres. The first type is utilised to identify personal strengths, interests, capabilities and areas of need in individual children. Check lists are available in textbooks, kits and diagnostic materials. You could prepare your own checklists by selecting developmental norms from various sources.

For children in the 0-5 years age range there are some easy-to-use developmental checklists available:

- Portage Guide to Early Education
- South Eastern Day Care Rating Scale
- Children's Developmental Progress
- Early Childhood Competencies Profile
- Developmental Record for Infants and Young Children

A complete bibliography of these tools is listed at the end of this section.

As in any area of record keeping, it is important to remember that checklists are confidential information. To safeguard any possible misinterpretation of your work be sure to record the child's first name only and to retain such records in a safe place.

It is also important to remind yourself that checklists are useful tools for collecting information about a child's developmental progress. They are not intended to be used as diagnostic indicators for learning problems.

SKILL CHECKLISTS

A second type of checklist is used to assist the caregiver or teacher who wants to gain specific information on skills that children display or areas of interest that children participate in during any set period of time. These types of checklists can be carried out on the entire group of children.

Let us say, for example, that you want to know how each child in the group is progressing in use of scissors. The usual method for setting up a skill inventory list is to list the children's names down the left hand margin and to identify skill levels across the top of the page. The following example provides a guide:

	TEARS PAPER	HOLDS SCISSORS BUT DOES NOT SNIP	FRINGES	CUTS LINES, CIRCLES	CUTS FABRIC	CUTS OWN SHAPES	CUTS ON THE LINE
MARY							
SUSAN							
RHONDA							
ALEX							
GRAHAM							

Two different types of recording can be used on such a form. The simple ✓ or X method identifies presence or absence of skill. Alternatively, you may wish to rate the child's level of development with a personally designed rating scale. Using the scissors example you may decide to adopt such criteria as these:

0= No attempt made

1= Attempt made, crude stage

2= Succeeds at task

3= Skilful use of tool

In using such a checklist it will be impossible to collect data on each child in a one day period. Hence, each block needs to be dated and coded to identify the exact time when the skill was observed.

PROGRAM CHECKLISTS

Checklists can also be utilised to help us identify how much use children are making of different areas of the program. You would utilise the same method of ruling up the page and would nominate program areas across the top of the page.

If, for example, you wanted to identify which children selected certain materials to use during self selected play you might monitor the situation over a week's duration to acquire cumulative data. Your checklist might look like this:

	BLOCKS	PUZZLES	BOOKS	DOUGH	PAINT
MARY					
SUSAN					
RHONDA					
ALEX					
GRAHAM					

If such records are kept cumulatively they may provide useful data on areas of interest for individuals and on popular areas of the program. Such data can assist adults in assessing the program offerings.

It is important to remember to date all records and to keep such data in a protected confidential place.

For further reference on developmental patterns, rating scales and checklists see:

Burdon, B. and Teasdale, G. (1985) *Developmental Record for Infant and Young Children.* Salisbury: CAE

Cataldo, C.Z. (1983) *Infant and Toddler Programs.* Reading: Addison Wesley.

CESA (1979) *Portage Guide to Early Education.* Wisconsin: Portage.

Cratty, B.J. (1979) *Perceptual and Motor Development In Infants and Young Children.* New York: Macmillan.

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Frost, J. and Kissinger, J.B. (1979) *The Young Child and the Educative Process.* London: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

O'Brien, C. (1982) *Movement and the Preschool Child.* Brisbane: Department of Education

O'Brien, C. and Ziviani, J. (1984) *Fine Motor Development and the Preschool Child.* Brisbane: Department of Education.

Sheridan, M. (1975) *Children's Developmental Progress.* Windsor: NFER.

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Tough, J. (1977) *The development of meaning: a study of children's use of language.* London: Allen & Unwin.

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ANALYSING RECORDED DATA

Once you have amassed some observation data it is necessary to analyse the information. The process of analysis is important as it helps us to select relevant facts from a large amount of material. The analysis stage allows us to remove ourselves from the situations described in running records, anecdotes and checklists and to objectively identify interests, abilities and emotional states of the child being observed.

The process of analysis described herein is called **decoding**. In decoding we attempt to identify developmental information about the child. You may choose to decode each observation immediately after you have completed it (the as-you-go method) or you may want to decode when you have completed collection of observation material (the later-on method).

As we are attempting to identify developmental information through the decoding process it is important to set up a system for extracting such data. A simple method has been developed by Lindberg and Swedlow (1976). In this method five areas are identified and all behaviour is coded in the following way:

1. **Physical Growth** (Description of child, general characteristics of activities, large and small muscular coordination, eating, dressing, toilet habits, rest)

2. **Social adjustment** (Attitude toward other children: ability to lead and follow; special friends, social techniques used with other children (sharing, cooperation, etc.); attitude towards adults: regular teachers, student teachers, visitors)

3. **Mental Growth** (Attention span and persistence; reasoning and problem solving; comprehension; abstract concepts; memory; imagination; language and vocabulary, ability to express needs and ideas)

4. **Emotional Growth** (Adjustment to change and new situations; ability to control emotions; expression of anger, fear, affection; expressions of joy, pleasure and spontaneity; reactions to discipline - testing, resistance, temper outbursts, etc.)

5. **Interests** (Activities preferred; favourite toys; ideas expressed in play; interest in stories and books; use of art materials; interest in music; experiences in science and other areas).

Reference

Lindberg, L. and Swedlow, R. (1976) *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Observation and Participation.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

The areas identified have become classification categories. In order to decode information from anecdotes and running records you must return to the data and begin a slow methodical interpretation of the behaviour already recorded.

The example on page 16 illustrates a comprehensively analysed running record.

Benjamin Aged 1.4 (16 months)

Date: May 1st, 1980

Time: 4.00pm - 4.10pm

Setting: In Grandmother's kitchen, with Grandmother, Mother, Father, Melissa (sister 4), Katherine (cousin, 5) and observer present.

Time	Observation	Decoding
4.00pm	Benjamin is near the bird cage when he hears the dog barking in the kitchen. He crawls in on his hands and knees. He stands up and moves to a chair. His father calls him, "**Come here**, Benjamin". Benjamin ignores his father and toddles to kitchen cupboard, where there are utensils hanging on wall. He tentatively touches one and it moves. He jabbers to it and pushes it. He pulls the utensil, seemingly trying to get it off its hook. He finally leaves it and toddles over to the table. Grandmother gives him a biscuit, which he takes in his left hand, saying "**Ta**" without being prompted. Dropping the biscuit, he bends down to pick it up, left handed. Benjamin then starts to blow bubbles, laughing and chortling. His laugh is high pitched. Melissa (sister) calls "**Benjamin**" He turns his body towards her and gabbles away.	1 Auditory perception - location of sound. 1a Motor skills - crawls 1b Stands from prone position - not needing support 2 Father not necessary at present - environment too interesting 1c Locomotion - balance still uncertain 3 Exploring skills 1d Reaching - hand/eye coordination 3a Language - still babbling but has purpose of communication to object (Sheridan). 3b Piaget's tertiary circular reactions - trial & error process problem solving 3c Attention span short, approx. 15 seconds 1e Handedness - fine motor grasp 3d Language response 2a Primitive knowledge of social role 1f Hand/eye co-ord. Fine motor control Motor devel. - stoop from standing position 3e Non verbal communication 4 Expresses pleasure 3f Recognition of own name 1g Location of sound 3g Response to name

Time	Observation	Decoding
	Seeing something on the floor, he drops to a prone crawling position and goes after it. It is a piece of cellophane, which he picks up with thumb and index finger of left hand. He crumples the paper, laughing at the sound. His mother takes it from him. He is not concerned by this loss and does not look for the lost plaything. Picking up an empty ice cream container, he drops it on the floor several times, listening to the sound. Then putting it on his head, he toddles across to his father, laughing. His stance, when walking, is inclined forward, feet slightly splayed and arms hanging loosely. He tends to run, as if he is afraid he will fall.	3h Curiosity 1h Reverts to more secure locomotion when needs to move quickly 3i Exploring environment - mastering skills 1i Left handedness - fine motor control 5 Intent in environment 3j Pleasure in sounds 4a Accepts removal of toy source -can use alternatives 3k Repetitive behaviour for its own sake. 5a Beginnings of dramatic play 2b Initiates pro-social behaviour 1j Gross motor skills - awkward, clumsy 1k Posture development - practising motor skills
4.05pm	Mother picks Katherine (cousin) up and nurses her, calling to Benjamin. He stops, turns, and appears very distressed. Crawling, he rushes over to his mother, "**No, no**" he cries, pulling himself up and trying to push Katherine off. He pulls at his mother, screaming, with arms extended to Mother. He tries to climb up on the chair, getting one foot on to bottom rung. Mother does not pick him up and he "dances" in agitation, then sits down with a thump and drums heels on the floor. Mother then	3l Recognises and responds to name 2c Reaction to another child 1L Uses faster locomotion in emergency 3m Language to express feelings - limited; reverts to physical 4b Attempt to remove source of conflict 4c Returns to source of comfort 1m Climbing skills; sharing mother with unknown rival - cannot compete for mother 4d Jealousy? 4e Physical reaction to emotional situation

Time	Observation	Decoding
	puts Katherine down and Benjamin then goes	4f Abrupt change
	back to the birdcage, talking to bird, in	3b Language - tuneful jabbering of Sheridan
	indecipherable words. Katherine walks near	
	mother, Benjamin watches tentatively. When	2d/4g Makes sure of situation - can relax when not threatened
	mother does not call to Katherine, Benjamin	
	crawls away from bird to a broom leaning on	3o Exploring environment - pleasure in repetition, both of action and results of action
	the wall. Sitting on the floor, he bangs the	
	handle of the broom against the wall. Laughing,	2e Content to play alone
	he continues to do this, listening to noise. He	1n Will use prop to support if available, but does not need one
	then pulls himself up, using broom as support	
	and totters to a bucket. He picks it up with two	1o Symmetry of action requires two hands for carrying
	hands on the handle and waddles towards	5b Likes to carry things
	father, feet splayed. Mother has again picked	1p Need to maintain balance
	up Katherine, and Benjamin suddenly sees	
	her. He throws bucket away and screams.	4h Emotionally dependent on familiar adults Anger - throws bucket away Tantrum - inability to share mother - but does not need her all time - content to know she is near, cannot share her
	Falling to the floor, he crawls to mother and	
	screams until she puts Katherine down and picks	
	him up. The screaming abruptly stops and	
4.10pm	Benjamin asks "**Bickie?**"	3p Makes request.

In this decoded running record you can see that the observer has isolated key behaviours and has categorised them along the Lindberg & Swedlow parameters. As there are numerous incidents in each area the observer has used an alphabetical system (a,b,c) to signify the frequency of behaviours in each category.

Note that the observer has also cited experts in the field (Sheridan and Piaget) where appropriate. In other words, the observer has made a connection between her first hand observation and a sound body of theoretical research. This demonstrates an ability to detach one's self from the event so as to make considered remarks about the child's current level of functioning.

SUMMARISING DATA

Once you have collected information and have decoded it you are in a position to make summary remarks about the child's behaviour based on your own observation. Data such as this becomes useful for a variety of situations.

Summary information can be used for providing reports to parents about children's progress and behaviour in the centre. Because you will have amassed a good deal of information in written form you will be able to be specific and accurate about the child's behaviour. This same specificity assists teachers and caregivers to plan more individually tailored programs that are sensitive to children's actual ability and interests.

The summary can be organised according to the five areas which have been used for decoding. One paragraph can be written about each aspect of development/interest. The following example illustrates a summary of Benjamin.

Summary writing may only need to occur two to three times per year. It is not necessary to follow a rigid program for observation and analysis. However, it is important to set aside some key dates for such an effort. The rewards of such a thorough-going process are worth the time.

Summary of Benjamin, aged 16 months

Benjamin at 16 months is just entering what is usually called the toddler stage. Gross motor development shows that he can stand from a prone position without needing support (1b). He is somewhat clumsy and tends to run more than walk (1j, 1k). Although he is learning the skill of walking and practises it, when he feels it necessary to get somewhere quickly, he reverts to the more secure method of crawling (1h, 1i). Gross motor skills also include being able to carry large objects i.e. a bucket, but the symmetry of action here requires 2 arms for carrying (1o). Feet tend to be turned out to help him maintain his balance. Fine motor skills show a delicate pincer grip, with the ability to pick up small items e.g. biscuit crumbs, cellophane paper. He is showing a definite preference for his left hand (1c, 1i). (Mother and sister left handed).

Generally, he is continually practising the skills of locomotion and hand/eye coordination, to explore his environment. Socially, he demonstrates the ability to play alone, but within the environment of adults. He can accept or reject adult intervention, depending on what he is doing, e.g. ignores father when Benjamin is doing something definite (2), but then uses father to interact with dramatic play (2a). He responds to his sister and communicates with her, but does not need her company (2). With Katherine, who is a cousin he sees every 2 or 3 months, he only reacts to her when she is threatening him, e.g. sitting on his mother's knee (2a). This is a negative interaction. At this stage of development, Benjamin exhibits a contentedness with solitary play.

His mental growth shows the beginnings of language development, although he is still happy just to explore his environment. When he says "**Ta**" (3d), he is displaying a learned response to a situation - has he become conditioned to this? He still babbles without meaningful sounds, but he "talks" to objects, (3a), [1]. He uses non-verbal communication and is taking sensory pleasure in the use of his mouth (3f). Sounds seem to give him pleasure (3k, 3p).

Language enables him to express his feelings i.e. he screams "**No, no**", when Katherine is on his mother's knee (3h) but at this stage, language is insufficient to express himself fully and he has to revert to a physical form of expression (3n).

He is a curious toddler, wandering from activity to activity with great rapidity, as his attention span is short. Simple things in his environment amuse him - swinging utensils, the noise of a container, a hanging broom handle - he is practising his locomotion and manipulative skills on his environment in order to develop his concepts of his world.

According to Piaget, he is exhibiting some responses to the 5th stage of the sensori-motor period of development, that of [2] "tertiary circular reactions" (3b) where he used trial and error to remove the utensil from the hook (the fact that he failed brought no response). Also, this stage shows repetition of activities in an innovative way - the dropping of the container, the banging of the broom handle.

Emotionally, we see Benjamin as beginning to develop his autonomy, but from a secure base of known adults e.g. he does not need to respond to his father's advances (4). He is basically happy, and takes pleasure in what he is doing, laughing aloud (4).

His greatest emotional difficulty is exhibited in his reaction to Katherine's relationship with his mother. His anger and fear are expressed both physically and verbally (4b; 4c) and a temper tantrum results when his actions don't achieve Katherine's removal (4c). Anger is also expressed by throwing things e.g. bucket.

However, I feel Benjamin is basically secure in his relationship with his mother, because he can resume his exploring when the source of the threat is removed i.e. he does not need to establish a physical contact with mother when she puts Katherine down (4). For Benjamin, it is sufficient that Katherine has gone.

His interests at this stage show a developing environmental interest - he wants to explore his world, (5). We see the joy most toddlers get in simply carrying things (5b). Benjamin is also starting the development of dramatic play, which will expand as his physical and language skills increase (5a).

Notes

[1] Sheridan, M. (1975) *Children's Development Progress from Birth to 5 Years.* Windsor: N.F.E.R.

[2] Mussen, Conger & Kagan. (1984) *Child Development and Personality.* (6th ed.) New York: Harper & Row p.110.

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Further Reading

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